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1970/05/27



Department of State

TOP SECRET

TELEGRAM

6167Q

O 271300Z MAY 70 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 922
RUMJIR/AMEMBASSY SAIGON 537

BT

T O P S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 1040

MAY 28 4:38 AM 1970

NODIS/KHMER

SUBJECT: FANK REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN THE NORTHEAST

REF: A. SAIGON 8144
B. PHNOM PENH 1017

1. DATT MET WITH GENERAL LON NOL FROM 0900 TO 1210 ON 26 MAY. FULL REPORT OF MEETING TRANSMITTED SEPARATELY. THIS MESSAGE CONCERNS ONLY THAT PORTION OF DISCUSSION WHICH INVOLVES FANK REQUEST FOR AID TO "GREEN TRIANGLE" IN NORTHEAST CAMBODIA.
2. GENERAL LON NOL EMPHASIZED THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE OF RETAINING GOVERNMENT PRESENCE IN NORTHEAST CAMBODIA. HE MENTIONED THE FALL OF ATTOPEU (XB 9838), AND THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNISTS IN THE PLATEAU DES BOLOVENS AREA OF LAOS PLUS VARIOUS REPORTS CONCERNING CHINESE COMMUNISTS ACTIVITIES WHICH POSE FURTHER THREATS TO THE NORTHEAST. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE SERIOUS NATURE OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE "GREEN TRIANGLE" AREA LOMPHAT (YV 1494-BUNG LUNG (YA 1429)-BA KEV (YA 3915), BUT AT NO TIME DID HE INDICATE THAT HE WOULD CONSIDER EVACUATION OF THE AREA. TO THE CONTRARY, HE STATED THAT HE INTENDED TO REGAIN CONTROL OF THE ENTIRE NORTHEAST. IN FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON THE NORTHEAST AREA, GENERAL LON NOL INVITED COLONEL PIETSCH TO FLY TO LABANSIEK (YA 1318) AND LOMPHAT (YV 1494) IN ORDER TO SEE FOR HIMSELF THE NATURE OF THE SITUATION.
3. DATT FLEW TO LABANSIEK VIA CAMBODIAN AIR FORCE C-47 AIRCRAFT DURING THE AFTERNOON OF 26 MAY ACCOMPANIED BY COMMANDANT UK SAUV, FANK G-3. MAJOR OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING THE ON-THE-SPOT VISIT ARE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:
 - (A) BRIGADIER GENERAL NEAK SAM, COMMANDER OF MILITARY REGION V WITH HEADQUARTERS IN LABANSIEK, IS QUIETLY IMPRESSIVE AS AN EFFECTIVE COMBAT COMMANDER. THE RESULTS OF HIS LEADERSHIP WERE IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. HE IS A QUIET, GENTLE MAN OF SLENDER STATURE (APPARENT AGE 45-50) WHO SPEAKS FRENCH SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY. HE DOESN'T SAY MUCH, BUT WHEN HE LOOKS AT HIS OFFICERS OR ENLISTED PERSONNEL, THEY MOVE FAST. GENERAL NEAK SAM HAS SPENT ABOUT SEVEN

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YEARS OF HIS MILITARY CAREER IN THIS AREA WITH ONE SHORT INTERVENING ASSIGNMENT IN PHNOM PENH AS CHIEF OF MUNITIONS IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. WHEN HOSTILITIES BEGAN IN NORTHEAST CAMBODIA LON NOL IMMEDIATELY REPLACED HIM IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND REASSIGNED HIM BACK TO HIS OLD AREA. NEAK SAM HAS DONE A REMARKABLY FINE JOB OF ORGANIZING DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AROUND LABANSIEK USING ONLY LOCALLY AVAILABLE MATERIAL. BGT GENERAL NEAK SAM TOLD COLONEL PIETSCH THAT HE WOULD HOLD THE LABANSIEK AT ALL COSTS. HE SAID THAT THE MORALE OF HIS TROOPS IS GOOD. THEN HE OUTLINED THE ASSISTANCE THAT HE NEEDED IMMEDIATELY. HE STATED HIS IMMEDIATE NEEDS INCLUDE: FORTIFICATION AND BARRIER MATERIALS; AERIAL FIRE SUPPORT AND AERIAL TRANSPORT FOR MEDICAL EVACUATION; MORTARS OR ARTILLERY TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FIRE SUPPORT, FOOD. HE ALSO STRESSED A NEED FOR TROOP REINFORCEMENTS TO HELP COMPENSATE FOR THE ENEMY'S SUPERIOR COMBAT EXPERIENCE AND CONSEQUENT SUPERIORITY IN CONDUCTING NIGHT OPERATIONS. HE STATED FRANKLY AND WITH QUIET DIGNITY THAT HIS TROOPS WERE AFRAID AT NIGHT AND THAT THE ENEMY HAS A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE IN THIS RESPECT.

(B) DATT WAS IMPRESSED BY HIS TOUR OF THE DEFENSIVE POSITIONS IN THE LABANSIEK AREA. EFFECTIVE USE HAS BEEN MADE OF THE MATERIALS PROVIDED BY NATURE. THE ENTIRE EFFORT HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY IMPROVISATION IN THE USE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES. FIELDS OF FIRE HAVE BEEN CLEARED. DEFENSIVE POSITIONS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED, AND WEAPONS ARE EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-MAINTAINED. TROOP STRENGTH IN THE VICINITY OF LABANSIEK APPROXIMATED 1,000 WITH MAIN ELEMENTS CONSISTING OF TWO INFANTRY BATTALIONS (BI), A DET ENGINEERS, TWO 76MM CHINESE FIELD ARTILLERY PIECES. FIVE OLD, INOPERATIVE TANKS WERE OBSERVED IN THE AREA BEING USED TO BLOCK ROADS. A TOUR OF DEFENSIVE POSITIONS REFLECTED THAT THE TROOPS WERE DISCIPLINED AND DETERMINED, AND THAT THE LIMITED RESOURCES AVAILABLE WERE BEING PUT TO GOOD USE.

(C) WHILE IN LABANSIEK AREA, DATT OBSERVED MILITARY DEPENDENTS (A TOTAL OF 20 WOMEN AND 19 CHILDREN) BEING EVACUATED BY AIR. THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE IN THE AREA INDICATED THAT PREPARATIONS WERE BEING MADE FOR AN ALL-OUT ENEMY ATTACK. ALL DATT OBSERVATIONS MADE WHILE IN THE AREA (AS WELL AS INFORMATION RECEIVED DURING THE MORNING DISCUSSION WITH LON NOL) INDICATE THAT THE "GREEN TIRANGLE" WILL BE DEFENDED TO THE FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE AND THAT NO CONSIDERATION WILL BE GIVEN TO EVACUATING THE AREA.

4. AT ABOUT 1915 HOURS ON 26 MAY, APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR AFTER DATT'S DEPARTURE FROM LABANSIEK AIRFIELD, THE ENEMY LAUNCHED A HEAVY ATTACK AGAINST LABANSIEK DEFENSES. THE ATTACK WAS CONCENTRATED AGAINST THE AIRFIELD AND BRIGADIER GENERAL NEAK SAM'S MILITARY HEADQUARTERS. PRELIMINARY REPORT FROM THE AREA INDICATE SEVERAL CASUALTIES INCLUDING SOME KILLED.

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5. WITHOUT CHALLENGING THE CONCLUSIONS REACHED IN AMEMBASSY SAIGON MESSAGE 8144 WE FEEL THERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL FACTORS WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BEFORE A FINAL DECISION WITH REGARD TO THE GREEN TRIANGLE IS REACHED.

(A) IN A DISCUSSION BETWEEN COLONEL PIETSCH AND BRIGADIER GENERAL POK SAM AN AT 1000 HOURS ON 27 MAY POK SAM AN STATED THAT GENERAL LON NOL HAD ISSUED FIRM ORDERS TO BRIGADIER GENERAL NEAK SAM TO REMAIN IN THE LABANSIEK AREA. POK SAM AN EMPHASIZED NO WITHDRAWAL WILL BE PERMITTED.

(B) ALL INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO US FROM DIRECT PERSONAL CONTACT WITH OTHER SENIOR OFFICERS OF FANK INDICATES THAT THE CAMBODIANS INTEND TO STAY IN LABANSIEK NO MATTER WHAT THE AMERICANS DO. LON NOL IS FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT IF HE ABANDONS THE AREA, THE ENEMY WILL ESTABLISH SIHANOUK AS A PUPPET ON CAMBODIAN SOIL IN THE LABANSIEK. LON NOL CONSIDERS THAT THE EFFECT OF ABANDONING THE LABANSIEK AREA, THE LAST GOVERNMENT STRONGHOLD EAST OF THE MEKONG, WOULD BE DISASTEROUS AND THAT A MILITARY DEFEAT IN THIS AREA WOULD BE POLITICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY LESS PAINFUL THAN HANDING THE AREA OVER TO THE ENEMY FREE OF CHARGE.

(C) WE BELIEVE THEY HAVE A SOLID FIFTY-FIFTY CHANCE OF SURVIVING AT LEAST THROUGH THE RAINY SEASON WITH NO SUPPORT FROM THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, WE PROVIDE MINIMUM SUPPORT IN THE FORM OF ENGINEER BARRIER MATERIALS AND OTHER ITEMS LISTED ABOVE IN PARAGRAPH 3(A) THEIR CHANCES OF SURVIVAL WILL BE INCREASED TO A SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN FIFTY-FIFTY LEVEL. IN EFFECT, WE WILL BE BUYING VALUABLE TIME WITH A VERY MODEST INVESTMENT IN TERMS OF ACTUAL COST OF THE SUPPORT FURNISHED.

7. IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, CHIEF OF MISSION AND DATT RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT FINAL DECISION URGING EVACUATION OF GREEN TRIANGLE BE DEFERRED UNTIL COLONEL PIETSCH, US DEFENSE ATTACHE IN PHNOM PENH, HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PERSONALLY DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH AMBASSADOR BUNKER AND GENERAL ABRAMS.

8. PIETSCH WILL ARRIVE IN SAIGON VIA SPECIAL AIR CAMBODGE FLIGHT AT 1040 HOURS SAIGON TIME ON 28 MAY TO ATTEND THE FIRST SSSG MEETING WHICH WILL BE CONVENED AT 1000 ON MAY 29.

9. IT IS REQUESTED THAT APPROPRIATE PORTIONS OF THIS MESSAGE BE PASSED TO SECDEF, JCS, DIA, AND THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS.

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NOTE: MESSAGE DELAYED DUE TO TRANSMISSION DIFFICULTIES.

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